

DEVELOPING AN INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the challenges and strategies for supporting employees with invisible disabilities in the workplace, focusing on a case study of Global IT Consulting, Inc. (Global), a management and IT consulting firm. In 2024, Global discovered that 40% of its workforce reported having invisible disabilities such as ADHD, dyslexia, anxiety, and depression. This revelation highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive organizational support systems tailored to these employees' needs. The research employs a narrative literature review to analyze current practices and theories related to workplace inclusivity for individuals with invisible disabilities. Key findings emphasize the importance of creating psychologically safe environments, implementing universal design principles, and shifting organizational perspectives using the Social Model of Disability. This article also explores the application of change management models, such as Lewin's Change Management Model and Bridges' Transition Model to foster inclusivity. This paper concludes that organizations can significantly improve employee well-being, productivity, and overall performance by implementing strategies that recognize, support, and empower employees with invisible disabilities. These strategies include awareness training, customized support, adaptive hiring practices, and inclusive communication methods. The findings have implications for human resource management, organizational culture, and diversity and inclusion initiatives in modern workplaces.

KEYWORDS: invisible disabilities, inclusive organizational culture, change management, social model, risk management

1. Introduction

In 2024, Global, a leading management and IT consulting firm, faced a pivotal moment in its organizational development after an employee climate survey revealed that 40% of its workforce disclosed having invisible disabilities such as ADHD, Dyslexia, Anxiety, and Depression. This significant finding underscored the pressing need for the company to rethink its approach to supporting employees with hidden disabilities, who often face unique

challenges in a fast-paced and highly demanding work environment. The survey results highlighted that many Global employees were struggling with unmet needs that impacted their performance, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. The company's leadership tasked a dedicated team with developing a comprehensive organizational culture and employee engagement support system tailored to the needs of employees with invisible disabilities to mitigate potential risks associated with ignoring the challenges of

employees with invisible disabilities. An organization that responds to specific employee needs with fairness and equity will benefit with improved performance and a positive culture that benefits all employees. A study by Schur et al. (2009) found that corporate cultures that emphasize diversity, flexibility, and inclusion are more likely to successfully integrate employees with disabilities.

2. Problem Statement

Global faced a critical challenge in supporting and integrating a significant portion of its workforce with invisible disabilities. The problem has many layers. There was a lack of awareness and understanding of invisible disabilities among leadership and staff. There was insufficient reasonable accommodation and support systems for employees with hidden disabilities. The potential productivity and engagement issues were due to unaddressed challenges faced by affected employees. The risk of talent loss, decreased employee satisfaction and performance if the issue remains unaddressed is very high. There are missed opportunities for leveraging the unique strengths and perspectives of neurodiverse employees.

3. Purpose

Global must now develop and implement a comprehensive strategy that creates a more inclusive work environment that recognizes, supports, and empowers employees especially those with invisible disabilities. This initiative is crucial for improving employee well-being and productivity but also for maintaining the company's competitive edge in attracting and retaining top talent in the IT consulting industry.

4. Significance Statement

Global faces potential productivity and engagement issues due to unaddressed challenges faced by affected employees.

Rutigliano (2024) reported on a study with Global Disability Inclusion that people with disabilities make up 7% of the workforce. These employees have lower scores, lower opportunities to advance, and are less likely to feel they can speak up at work (Rutigliano, 2024). Fortunately, companies that implement strategies to improve their diversity, equity, and inclusion policies increased from 8% in 2011 to 14% in recent years (Rutigliano, 2024). What is the impact of not creating an inclusive environment for all employees, including those with invisible disabilities? A survey by the Society of Human Resource Management found that employees with invisible disabilities were twice as likely to feel excluded at work, and the stress of managing their disability without the organization providing reasonable accommodations negatively affected their mental health and work performance (Gonzales, 2023). The Global Disability Inclusion study discussed higher turnover intention, employees resistant to disclose their disabilities, dealing with the stigma or the disability and stunted career progression and the impact of their work performance compounding the psychological impact of unmet needs in the workplace (Rutigliano, 2024).

These studies collectively demonstrate that unaddressed invisible disability challenges can significantly impact employee performance through reduced engagement, increased turnover intention, limited career progression, and psychological stress. If Global does not create a more inclusive environment and provide the necessary accommodations that their employees have brought to their attention, then they will be limiting the potential of a significant portion of their workforce and overall organizational performance.

5. Literature Review

Lawson & Beckett (2020) presented a study aiming to reorient how organizations think about the relationship between the

social model of disability and the human rights model. The authors contest the prevailing view that the human rights model of disability improves upon or replaces the social model. Instead, they propose that models are complementary and serve distinct but equally important roles (Lawson & Beckett, 2020). Lawson and Beckett's (2020) work contributes to the ongoing discourse on disability rights by proposing a more nuanced understanding of how different models of disability interact and complement each other. The World Economic Forum (2025) published an article highlighting the importance of neurodiversity in driving business success. The article emphasizes the practical steps for fostering neuro-inclusion, including leadership commitment, neuro-inclusive recruitment, tailored workplace adjustments, and training and awareness programs.

Lefevre-Levy et al. (2023) studied neurodiversity in the workplace. Neurodivergent individuals possess unique skills and perspectives and creating a neuro-inclusive workplace should consider strategies that provide awareness training, offer customized support, adapt the physical environment with accessible furniture and meeting spaces, improve communication with adaptive tools and systems, foster open dialogue, and implement inclusive hiring practices. Ellis (2024) offered insights on creating an inclusive workplace for neurodivergent employees. They suggest strategies such as providing education and awareness training, using clear communication, offering accommodations and support, adjusting recruitment and hiring processes, and creating a supportive culture. Recent understanding and knowledge of neurotypical and atypical conditions has broadened and, in some cases, revised to increase awareness of process adjustment to be mindful of expanded normalization of neurotypical and neuroatypical behaviors and characteristics in order to make the

hiring process more equitable and enhance the organization's performance with talents and skills. Kyrzeminska et al.'s (2019) study discussed adjusting these perspectives to recognize valuable skills and talents that neurodiverse people display by widening the definition of talent within the hiring process. By improving talent criteria and adjusting interview and hiring processes, neuroatypical candidates and current employees can experience the same potential job satisfaction, economic security, and a context in which all can contribute their talents and skills to the organization. The benefits to the employee, the organization, and society at large are tangible and intangible when previously excluded members of the population become gainfully employed productive members of society.

6. Method

A narrative literature review allows for structured examination of peer-reviewed articles providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in the field.

6.1. Problem Solving Model

There are no models that directly address solving problems of inclusive corporate culture specific to employees with invisible disabilities. However, there are several general problem-solving models that can be adapted to create an inclusive environment. Collaborative Problem-solving model emphasizes teamwork and diverse perspectives. Hanson et al. (2020) studied applying collaboration to general and special education practices to build more inclusive education environments. The Plan-Do-Act Cycle addresses inclusivity in an iterative process allowing for continuous improvement in supporting all employees (Dudin et al., 2017). The A3 report approach could be adapted to systematically address issues related to a more inclusive corporate culture for

employees with invisible disabilities. Schwagerman III & Ulmer (2013) presented the benefits of A3 modeling for lean management and leadership thought. The 5 Whys technique helps uncover deeper issues related to inclusivity and reveal hidden obstacles that employees with invisible disabilities might face. Bossert (2022) explains how the flexibility of the 5 Whys approach provides a structured approach to problem-solving within organizations. Organizations that incorporate one or a combination of these problem-solving frameworks can create more inclusive cultures that value and leverage the strengths of all employees, including those with invisible disabilities.

6.2. Risk Management Model

A diverse and inclusive workplace encourages open dialogue, ethical decision-making, and reporting of misconduct, which builds a more robust corporate culture. A culture of inclusivity promotes open communication and transparency and leads to more comprehensive risk assessments and identification of risks that may not be apparent in less diverse cultures.

Risk management requires understanding the broader implications and impacts of social and cultural contexts. The social model of disability helps understand disability by focusing on how society creates barriers for people with impairments, rather than viewing disability as an individual medical problem. A Social Model (Lawson & Beckett, 2020) of risk management can help shift the cultural perspective of viewing disabilities as individual problems to the opportunity to remove organizational barriers that create risks through employees with invisible disabilities. Global's employees' concerns regarding their unmet needs and accommodations increase anxiety and negatively impact their performance. Adapting the social model to Global's risk management helps focus on removing

organizational barriers that create risk for employees with invisible disabilities, shift the organizational culture of viewing disabilities as an individual problem to one that the organization can accommodate and provide support, and implement policies and practices that accommodate diverse needs to reduce overall organizational risk.

Global can build a corporate culture that values all employees, regardless of whether they live with a disability or not, provides an opportunity to support risk management by leveraging the talents of all employees through the expanded hiring practices and processes. Universal design theory advocates for creating environments and systems that are accessible to all regardless of disability status. The universal design workplace implements policies that are flexible and beneficial for all employees, has physical and digital spaces with accessibility in mind, and provides many options for communications and task completion. Pionke (2017) studied the impact of providing accessible academic library functions and services for the patrons that had disabilities, invisible and visible. The study reviewed the patrons' perspectives of how well the library accommodated their disabilities (Pionke, 2017). Combining aspects of universal design and social model with risk management helps the organization include the needs of employees with disabilities to ensure the workplace is an inclusive environment with accommodations that support all employees.

Lewin's Change Management Model (Malik, 2022) is a three-step model that involves preparing for change, implementing the new processes, and solidifying the new status quo. Bridges Transition Model (Bridges, n.d.) is useful for Global to create an inclusive environment for their employees with disabilities. This model focuses on the psychological aspects of change by emphasizing ending, losing, and letting go, the neutral zone, and the new beginning (Bridges, n.d.). This model emphasizes that

transition is an internal psychological process, distinct from external change (Bridges, n.d.). Applying Bridges' model to inclusivity efforts involves guiding employees through the psychological process of change. In the Ending phase, Global must help employees let go of outdated perceptions about disabilities. The Neutral zone provides an opportunity for education and challenging biases. The new beginning is when Global can establish new inclusive practices and attitudes. Integrating Bridges' Transition Model with insights from Lewin's Change Management Model, Global, can more effectively navigate the psychological aspects of change to foster an inclusive culture (Bridges, n.d.; Malik, 2022).

7. Final Recommendations and Results

The recommended framework for Global combines elements of Universal Design and Social Model to create an inclusive workplace strategic plan with specific considerations for invisible disabilities. The strategic plan should create an environment where all employees, regardless of visible or invisible disabilities, can thrive and contribute fully. Global should implement a comprehensive strategic plan that involves the following key strategies (Table no. 1).

Table no. 1
Global IT Consulting, Inc. Strategies for Employee Engagement

Strategy	Description
Employee Resource Group	Create group focused on disability including, involving employees with visible and invisible disabilities in the change process (Brouse, 2023)
Clear Communication	Provide clear reasons and benefits for changes through formal and informal channels such as marketing materials posted around the physical office space and company social media sites
Open Dialogue	Foster open and honest communication between employees and management
Training and Resources	Provide training and resources for all employees, interactive workshops simulating experiences of those with invisible disabilities (Laker, 2024)
Leadership Support	Ensure leadership supports and models inclusive behaviors
Continuous Improvement	Implement regular monitoring, assessment, and refinement activities based on feedback and outcomes
Formal Accommodation Process	Establish a formal process for requesting accommodations, ensuring privacy and respect throughout the organization (Laker, 2024)

Global's leaders must demonstrate a clear commitment to disability inclusion by setting the tone for the entire organization (Laker, 2024). The Global strategy must have inclusiveness as a core value in all business

operations. By implementing this strategic plan proposed in Table no. 2, Global can become a more inclusive organization where all employees feel valued, understood, and empowered to thrive.

Table no. 2
Proposed Global IT Consulting, Inc. Employee Engagement Plan

Year 1 • Q2: Establish a Disability Employee Resource Group to guide the inclusion strategy • Q3: Conduct organization-wide assessment of current disability inclusion practices • Q4: Develop and announce a formal disability inclusion policy with clear commitments from leadership	Year 2 • Launch comprehensive training programs, including unconscious bias training and cultural competency workshops • Implement fair hiring practices and equal opportunity policies • Begin universal design improvements for workplace environments and technologies • Q4: Initiate engagement campaigns to raise awareness about invisible disabilities
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Year 3 • Q1: Introduce flexible work arrangements to accommodate various needs • Q2: Invest in and implement assistive technologies for digital tools • Q3: Establish accountability guidelines for disability inclusion • Q4: Conduct first annual review of disability inclusion progress	Year 4 • Q1: Expand ERG initiatives and support programs • Q2: Enhance communication strategies to encourage open dialogue about disability needs • Q3: Implement advanced inclusivity seminars for all employees • Q4: Conduct second annual review and adjust strategies as needed
Year 5 • Q1: Launch mentorship programs for employees with disabilities • Q2: Implement disability inclusion metrics in performance evaluations for leadership • Q3: Expand assistive technology offerings based on employee feedback • Q4: Conduct comprehensive evaluation of the strategic plan's impact	Year 6 Q1: Celebrate achievements and share success stories of inclusion Q2: Set new targets for the next five year period Q3: Develop and announce an updated strategic plan based on learnings and progress Q4: Position Global as a leader in disability inclusion, sharing best practices with other organizations

This timeline allows for gradual implementation of the strategic plan, with key milestones over five years. It provides ample time for each initiative to be properly

developed, implemented, and evaluated with regular reviews to ensure the strategy remains effective and adaptable to changing needs.

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